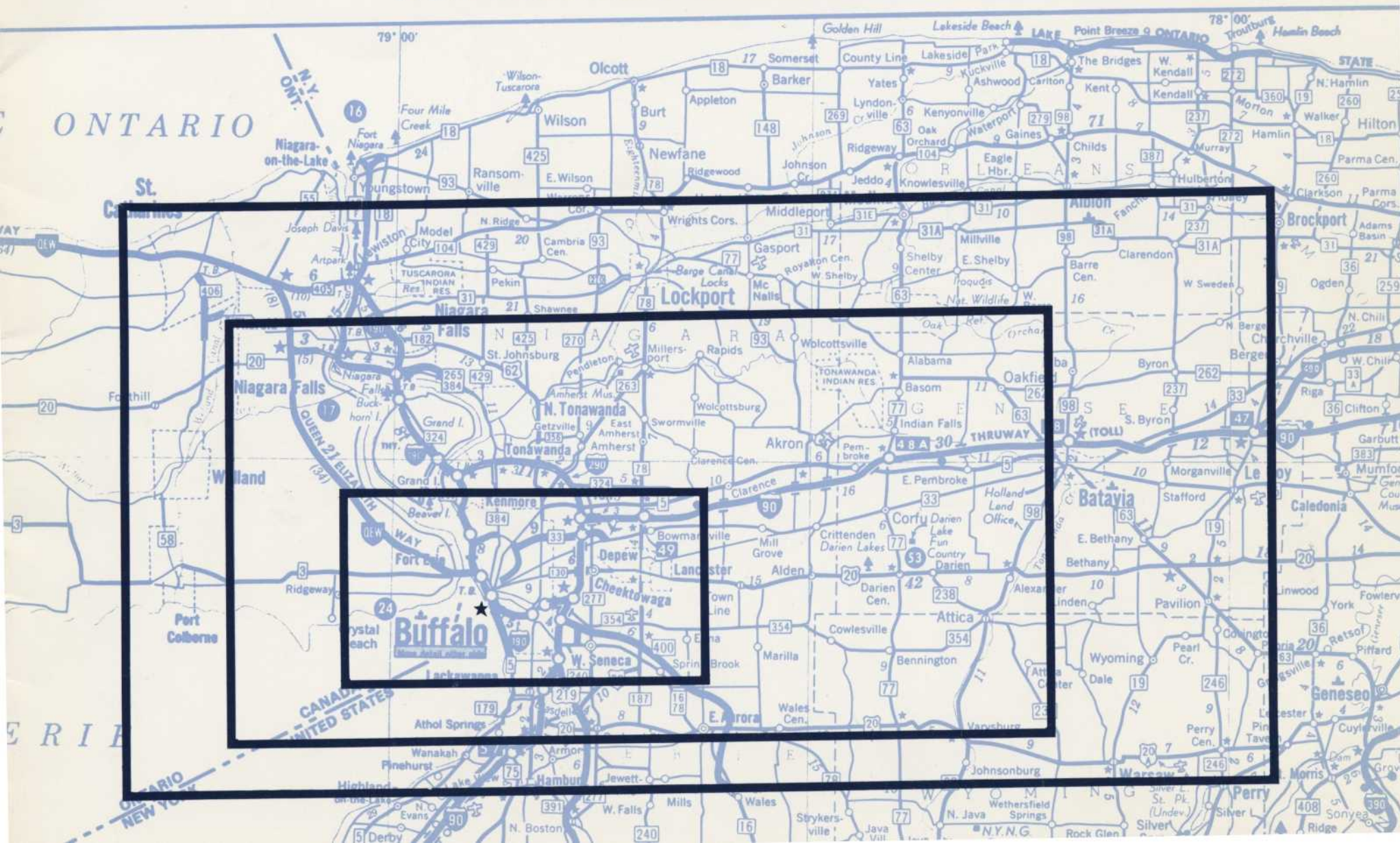# MEDIA BUFF.
Media Art of Buffalo, New York
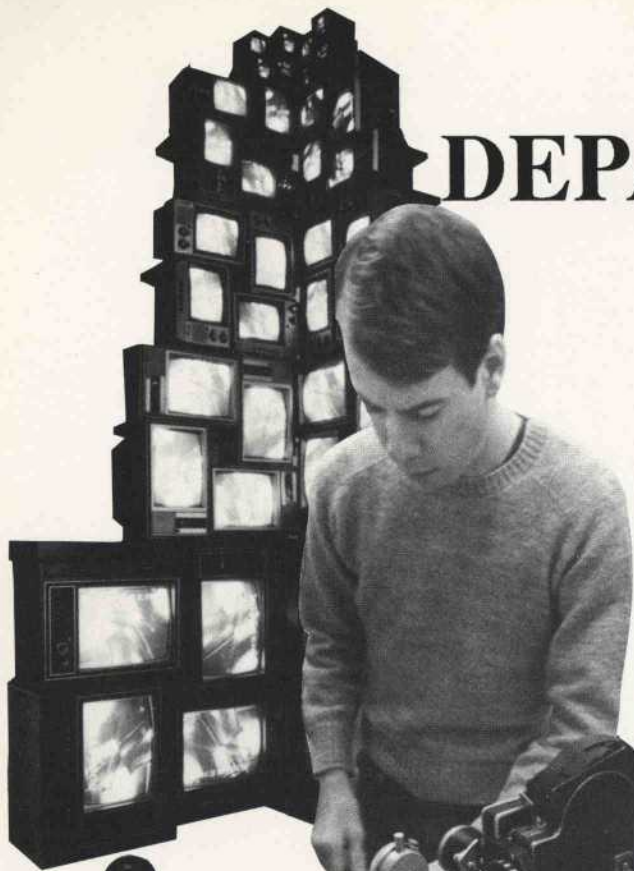### New York State Artists Series VIII

MEDIA BUFF.

Media Art of Buffalo, New York
New York State Artists Series VIII

**Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art
September 9 - November 12, 1988**

An exhibition organized by Richard Herskowitz, director of Cornell Cinema and adjunct curator of film and video at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art.

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA STUDY

Media Study focuses on the making and interpretation of three creative technologies — film, video, and the computer. Students concentrate on "making" or "interpretation" but all take courses in both areas. "Making" engages students in the production of personal works in image/sound composition and in the use of computers in generating and processing images and sounds and their interfaces with the non-digital technologies of film and video. "Interpretation" involves students in many traditional and new methods for understanding the meaning of narrative, documentary, experimental, and iconic modes of image/sound composition. These studies include historical, theoretical, analytical, and interdisciplinary approaches and stress the impact of these forms on both individual consciousness and social culture.

UB's degree program has introduced a radical new organization into this field of study. During the past twenty-five years, four developments have changed the field. Film and television equipment has become portable, computers have become miniaturized, and both have become generally accessible.

Transmission technologies are no longer limited to broadcast, but include cable, satelite, and digital data systems. The forms of communication, from the spoken word to written manuscript to printed book to television program, have been re-examined and become regarded as codes (media).

A model of study has developed that places media in the context of the evolution of human consciousness and culture, a discipline requiring multidisciplinary approaches. This acceleration of technology and concern with bio-culture have made it clear that general education must be international and cross-cultural. All of the human codes or symbol systems people already use, such as language, writing, gesture, and sound, are now incorporated into the new image/sound technologies which can be transmitted simultaneously to everyone on our own and other planets, and it has been demonstrated that each person and culture perceives "the world" according to the media codes which

Media Study faculty, past and present: Hollis Frampton ,

are used to apprehend and express it.

Media Study, as concieved at the University of Buffalo, has become the field which defines the new humanities by including the older liberal arts, by incorporating the electrical and biological sciences that have given birth to new instruments and theories of learning and growth, and by focusing on art and technology to provide multiple roles for those who will need to use the cultural technologies to improve our technological culture. Media Study is committed to the preparation of artists, but its total support of the individual creative vision is unlike traditional art school curricula. Instead, Media Study advocates that personal expression should arise from a strong general education both interdisciplinary and international in scope.

Media Study also differs from traditional programs in communications because its emphasis is less on the study of abstract models of communication theory and governmental policies of management and more on the understanding of practical human issues, such as how the

new technologies are restructuring urban and global societies. Likewise, the emphasis in "making" is not on reinforcing standardized programming formats, but on exploring new modes, such as the camera notebook, the observational record, the institutional analysis, the investigative report, the scientific diary, and the sound/image poem which will allow students to bring their own innovative forms to bear on the world.

Media Study is probably most unlike traditional curricula in this general field in its emphasis on placing film, video, and computer study within the context of the evolution of consciousness and culture. Media Study is not seen as an experimental science in search of laws, but as an interpretive one in search of meaning. Methods of study from physiology, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology are all used in support of this effort. The program exposes students to image/sound works from all countries and encourages cross-cultural study.

Gerald O'Grady ,   Woody Vasulka ,   and Paul Sharits

Barbara Lattanzi, Documentation photos from *Amnesia*. (1982).

BARBARA LATTANZI

Barbara Lattanzi

Barbara Lattanzi produces films, photographs, and mixed-media installations that have been exhibited at film showcases and galleries throughout the United States. Some of these exhibition sites include the Los Angeles Center for Photography, the Collective for Living Cinema and Artists Space in New York City, the San Francisco Cinematheque, Pacific Film Archives in Berkeley, and Chicago Filmmakers. In 1984 she received a Visual Arts Fellowship in Photography from the National Endowment for the Arts. Lattanzi holds a Master of Arts degree from the Center for Media Study of the State University of New York at Buffalo. She served as technical director of Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo from 1983 to 1988 and is currently its associate video curator.

Waking and Sleeping --
Allegories of Being a Media Artist in Buffalo

Two halves of a bridge lower slowly and join together. The two halves join railroad tracks. Immediately a train races by, too quickly to see the individual cars, looking like blood racing through veins. The space the train and the curved track creates is both plastic and muscular.

You are on a ship that is sailing through the halls of a large building. It is approaching the cafeteria, which is not your destination, and you are becoming irritated by some children who playfully pull on a rope and slow your passage. You are situated at the top level of the ship, built like a multi-level wedding cake. But you feel uneasy, as if in an irrelevant position, because you look down at the bottom-most level and see three people who are sitting right next to the dark gray waters--two women and an older man, Captain of the ship.

Life of the Party (1983).

You are riding home on your bicycle and have to travel through downtown Buffalo, but you are only wearing green bikini underpants and wonder if anyone will notice. Nearing home, you are riding down a hill so steep that you pick up terrific speed, narrowly missing collisions with at least one group of pedestrians, one other bicyclist, and a whole stream of oncoming cars with their headlights on (although it is daylight).

You and some strangers are in a large earth depression

Barbara Lattanzi, Documentation photos from *Double Cross* installation. (1983).

some-where within a tropical forest. Suddenly all of you are up to your necks in water. You proceed to observe the animal life on the surface of the water-- frogs, snakes, insects, etc.

You are seated next to a certain pas-senger on a crowded bus who is studying a map. You notice your own name used as a location on the map and wonder if you should point this out.

Over and over you watch as baroque statues swim to

Life of the Party (1983).

their proper configuration in the middle of a fountain.

You are stuffing flies into a purse. There are millions of them. They are all milling around and buzzing. They are black and shiny. You are failing in your attempts to trap the awful sight. The appearance of their bodies being squashed is the appearance of unraveled and tangled movie film being forced into a small space but always expanding.

You go to visit John Cage who is living in a mansion by the sea. There is to be an "art event" which is to take place in a large forest somewhere outside of the United States. In fact, you will have to take a cargo plane in order to cross a large body of water to get to it. Your role is to compose music for the event. Here is your plan: your music will be heard not during the event but after it. After all the activities and exuberance of the festival are over and night has come, everyone will be gathered in a clearing deep within the forest. But sleep will not come to any of them - all are uneasy in the

Life of the Party (1983).

knowledge that the group is defenseless against any dangers (they have no weapons) and they are in an isolated spot cut off from the rest of the world. Each will lie very still, unable to sleep, listening, waiting. This is when your part in the "event" takes place. As an ac-companiment to this silent fear, you improvise your music. Everyone hears the music, but no one is listening to it, so intensely are they waiting for something else--the sounds of unknown dangers.

Barbara Lattanzi
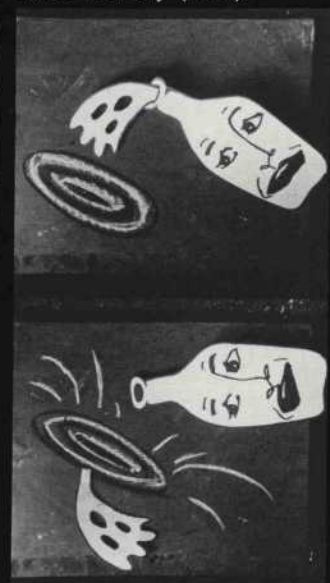
HALLWALLS
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

A confluence of contemporary art praxes surrounding media and time-based arts, the plastic arts, performance, music, and writing has consistently characterized the working and exhibition environments at Hallwalls. The founding consortium of artists hosted exhibitions, screenings, and discussions with national and local artists who were working with a variety of media and image constructions and within an art discourse that was coming to be considered postmodern. A Hallwalls artists' statement from 1975 mandated the group "to provide local access to the network that currently circulates information about developing ideas of art." Since its founding by Charles Clough and Robert Longo in 1974 in the halls adjacent to their studios, Hallwalls staffers have initiated projects which have been self-authorizing for them as emerging artists, and which consistently have probed contemporary art and media discourses with and for the Buffalo art community. Early statements also detail the founding group's commitment to network with other national and regional emerging and self-defining artist communities such as A Space in Toronto, Artists Space in New York, N.A.M.E. Gallery in Chicago, Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, Media Study/Buffalo, and especially CEPA Gallery in Buffalo.

The interest in media and the interplay of constructs around media, performance and the plastic arts at Hallwalls are evident from its inception as an artists' project. Examining calendars from the first two years reveals screenings, performances, and installations by Vito Acconci, Willoughby Sharp, Nancy Holt, John Baldessari, Ericka Beckman, Dan Graham, and Ed Bowes. Documentation of programming was prioritized, providing important reference material for ongoing discussions, as well as insuring the presence of media production within the gallery. Such commitments, which enhanced the visibility of artists working with, or exhibiting through, Hallwalls, generated a purpose and a legacy which in turn attracted and inspired future waves of artists who came to program and inhabit Hallwalls' spaces.

Beyond the commitments of its founding members, the planning and development of the organization's current media programs in video and film are the result of second, third, and fourth waves of artist/programmers. Kathryn High, technical director and a video/performance programmer from 1979 to 1982, credits Bill Currie, director from 1980 to 1986, with a keen insight into evolving media art trends and exigencies. High recalls conversations in which they strategized about establishing a regular video gallery, a cable television show, and enhanced production and post-production capacities-- programs which have taken years to develop. Equally influential initiatives during this time, which generated energy in the form of new audiences, participating artists, and challenges to the media arts community, were Keith Sanborn's traveling film exhibition *Super-8 Berlin* (1983), Tony Billoni's introduction of provocative, young performance artists such as Karen Finley (1981) and Ann Magnuson (1982) from the emerging New York City club scene, and High's staging of media productions/performances, such as Jaime Davidovitch's Buffalo edition (cablecast) of *The Live Show* (1982).

Current media programming at Hallwalls--regular video and film exhibitions, tape rentals, a video post-production facility, a weekly public access television show, a growing series of performances, film and interarts regrants to artists, publications, and traveling exhibitions-- are in part the result of later artists/programmers finding it necessary to "invent and re-invent the wheel many times," as Keith Sanborn pointed out in a recent letter to *The Squealer* (May 1988). Over the years, and especially during the generally conservative societal entrenchment of the last ten years, Hallwalls' programmers and directors worked to maintain an "alternative" art space even when the siting of an

"alternative" culture in the U.S. has shifted dramatically. During this time, the profile of western New York's media organizational resources has changed significantly-- Media Study/Buffalo, an important media exhibition and production pioneer, closed its doors in 1986; public access cable television, through Sunship Communications, is now slowly establishing its presence as a largely unexplored venue for media artists; and Squeaky Wheel, a young video- and filmmakers coalition, now provides equipment access and a regular opportunity for dialogue through screenings and a publication. In 1988 Hallwalls' Film and Video programs remain committed to developing exhibition initiatives and production resources which will support a vital and articulate community of mediamakers in western New York. Perhaps Hallwalls' longevity and viability as an alternative space in the 1980s is the result of an organizational evolution, which, over the years, chose to support a range of artmaking foci. Individual artists/programmers could take risks with projects and ideas without threatening the entire organizational structure or audience.

The self-authorizing and largely symbiotic relationship between the working artists' projects and the presenting organization which fueled the Hallwalls of the mid-1970s has evolved into complex preoccupations with the notion of audience(s). Discussions dwell on concerns with postmodern critical engagements with a pluralistic

SEPTEMBER

VIDEO VIEWING ROOM

SOU ACERNO   KEVIN CAUTELD   JEN COHEN   AMBER DENKER

LAURA EMRICK   RICK FRANKEN   JAY PHIPPODE

STACY GOLDBERG   DANIE GOLDSMITH   MICHAEL HORVATH   KIRSTEN MOSHER

LOTTO

MICHAEL MINELLI   MICHAEL MORRIS   DAVID HYZIO

BARTHOLOME OWENS   ROY SCHMIDT   JIM SHEPPARD   ANNE SUPPRENAUT

BIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA   SETH TOBOCMAN   CLIFF WANG

AS METAPHOR
SEPTEMBER 18 - OCTOBER 30, 1987

GUEST CURATOR:
ROBERT LONGO

This show is a random sampling of works that have emerged out of the burden of careerism and commercialism in the art world. For most of the artists in the show, I believe that many of this group will survive, grow, and continue to contribute important works in the bigger picture.

Rather than lumping them all together or packaging them under one simple aesthetic, a creative diversion in the works represents a diversion in contemporary vision and life. If similarities exist between artists' works, it is not necessarily self-consciousness or trend but the demand of time.
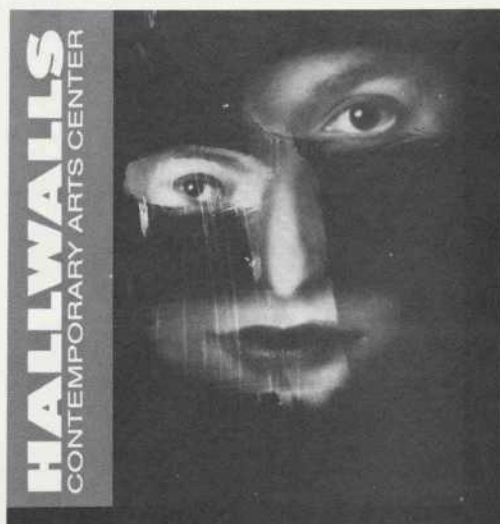
The spirit behind this show is to give an opportunity to view works that are aggressive, thoughtful and generally have no outlet.

— Robert Longo

AUDIENCE AS PROTAGONIST:
GETTING INTO THE PICTURE

HALLWALLS
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

readership and the construction of a viewing subject, on questions about what kind of audience exists for new and often problematic (media) art in Buffalo and elsewhere, and on curatorial investigations into the communicational transactions set in motion between a media/art event and an audience/viewer. Programmers are convinced that Hallwalls must remain a kind of decentralized uplink for some version of contemporary culture, and not merely a downlink from some distanced tastemaking authority.

Programs which have both investigated and provoked these concerns in recent years include *Re-Positions* (1986), a series of

function within a fifteen year old "alternative" cultural space, it is because of a paradoxical "tradition" of generous and anxious programmers and administrators who respect, even if they are not always comfortable with, an initiating and problematizing spirit in their co-workers and other artists.

Chris Hill
Video Curator,
Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center

narrative films by women, *Picture This/Films Chosen by Artists* (1986-87), and *The Other Sex* (1988) a gay, lesbian, and alternative sexuality film festival--all curated by Steve Gallagher; *Reviewing Histories: New Latin American Cinema* (1987), organized by guest curator Coco Fusco with Steve Gallagher; *The Medicine Show* (1986-87), a video exhibition comparing media and medicine's involvement with dis-ease, organized by Chris Hill; *Floating Values* (1987), a survey of strategies involving gender in media, painting, and photography, co-curated by Chris Hill and Catherine Howe; *Audience as Protagonist* (1987), a program of tapes which include the audience in their frame of reference, curated by Barbara Lattanzi; and *Infermental 7* (1988), an internationally solicited and touring video exhibition, juried by Tony Conrad, Peter Weibel, Rotraut Pape, and Chris Hill. Recent and upcoming commissioned media installations by Ericka Beckman, Tony Labat, Rob Danielson, and Pat Oleszko, and many other interarts projects through the Performance, Music, and Fiction programs continue to forge a discourse around film, video, and digital image construction, and their transactions with other art disciplines.

Hallwalls seems to have historically offered its artists/programmers and audiences a site for the performance of an unsettled attention, one which resists or confronts the easy framing of an artist's or curator's project. If Hallwalls' media programming can be provocative and

Tony Conrad, *That Far Away Look*
(1988). Photo: E. Spiro.

TONY CONRAD

Dolomite: Having no trust in readers

Tony Conrad teaches in the media faculty of SUNY at Buffalo, where he is also actively associated with the Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center and the Squeaky Wheel Media Coalition.

Over the last ten years he has been especially active in video and performance art. His work with music composition and performance started while he was a mathematics student at Harvard University, after which he was associated with the founding of "minimal" music and "underground" film. His movie *The Flicker* is one of the key early works of the structural film movement. Most recently, he has returned to music, with performances in New York, and upcoming at the New Music America Festival (Miami, 1988), in Buffalo, and at Ars Electronica, Linz. He is a co-editor, with Chris Hill, and Peter Weibel, of an international video exhibition, *Infermental 7*, which is currently being programmed through Hallwalls.His recent videotapes, *Redressing Down* and *That Far Away Look*, are being programmed nationally. Currently he is collaborating with composer Rhys Chatham and choreographer Isabelle Marteau on a performance piece, *Battle of the Nile* (1989), which tells the story of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. Tony Conrad has written in support of regional arts production, with particular attention to the shifting conditions of independent media production in recent times. His criticism, which suggest a new collaborative relationship between art and industry, appears regularly in *The Squealer*, the newsletter of Squeaky Wheel.

1. First parable

"Hey!" yells this young guy as I swerve past on my beat-up three-speed.

"You want to buy a bike?" It is a beaut; he wants $25.

Well--but of course, I always say, my crummy bike wouldn't ever get stolen from me, whereas this one..."It's not hot, I could put it right in the paper! `Bob S---, 204 W---Street, selling Royal ten-speed bike.'" He is going to Florida. It's not hot. How about $20?

His abrupt denial jumps to the truth of the matter. In short, he has been forced by circumstances into a position of weakness, and forced to reveal that weakness in the very act of covering for it. An outlaw.

When I try to "sell" you on art from Buffalo, my hand is forced in that same way. Is it inevitable, that the very fact that one lives outside the great cultural centers (that we don't live in New York City) forces us to embolden our cultural assault, from necessity--and then that doing this itself causes this effort, the effort to deliver convincingly, to stumble into confusion?

2. New kinds of hobby fun

Suddenly everyday people are devising lots of new ways to create and package information. Alternative culture is quietly flourishing, without any of the hype it had in the 1960s; it is finding space to grow in the cracks of our society, places where publicity is ill-suited.

The self-published "'zines" scene and independent audio cassette distribution are just two of the new media venues made possible by cheap electronics and xeroxing. In some respects they are the most traditional-seeming of the new forms, while computer bulletin boards, answering machine messaging, and the invention of new media crimes are at the cutting edge. For instance, when hackers despoil the phone network ("Computer `Hackers' Viewed as a Threat to Phone Security," *New York Times*, July 22, 1988), isn't that a new channel for creative expression?

So here are conspicuous examples of cultural forms which (1) arise without leadership, geographically dispersed, and (2) involve consumer technologies which were not on the market ten years ago. Alternative video takes a privileged spot on this new horizon: it has ties to commercial movies, to home movies, to MTV, to small entrepeneurial enterprises using video, and to TV news, as well as to the independent media tradition. In the longer run, more people will attempt alternative video than any other decentralized medium.

3. Introduction

I want art to stand strong, to display how it manipulates its audience. I want it to take up their expectations, their sense of the world, their predispositions toward the way they think or use their language, and then to use these things perversely, politically, colorfully, "expressively." Video is a good form for working that way. Because it is composed of both language and images, video can be more "real" than a text, more composed than "reality."

Somehow, in this short stretch of words, I need to span across the ideas of an antidictatorial language, new decentralized media, and an image-based art/critical practice that leans upon the interpretive machinery of the viewer.

4. Conclusion

"Authority"--the **mechanism** of "power"--is "expectation" of success or force. I want to use these words in this very specific way. Even in the context of direct physical force, **authority** must be identified with **expectations**. The **power** of the establishment is physical; its **authority** is conveyed through law, through written orders. Writing always represents, intercedes, announces--written law delivers the expectation of force and power.

Expectation, the armature which shapes force into authority, has all the complexity of real-world psychological stuff--a cluster of interactive, related, but different, transactional structures--command, interrogation, belief, and negotiation.

5. The authority of authorship

Few people keep their attention on the way that words work on us from moment to moment. But when we speak, we generally have some target image of the understanding of the listener in our mind, and this is a part of the process of our formulation of the sequence of words. Even now as I write, I can be aware of the reflection of the words I think of--floating ahead and congealing from time to time into sets of specific choices: would my reader understand such-and-such a construction? Is this tone proper to impress you?

6. Reading and thinking about it

Words do not have power, they have authority. When words induce expectational processes in us, they are linking us to power structures. Take your reading this now as an example....

During reading, too, there is always an image of the text consolidating itself within us. This is a part of the processingthat changes the received material of our language into what we say. As you read, a "landscape" of the character of the text assembles (and dissembles) itself before your "mind's eye." The interplay between us, between the projections upon that "landscape" which may be anticipated by me the writer, on the one hand, and the construction which your "landscape" implies for the tone of voice (the personality) of the writer, on the other, measures our mutual expectations of one another; it measures the authority of my writing, of the words.

The price of forgetting the distance between our expectations is paid in a misperception equivalent to letting authority equal power.

7. The authority of the cultural center is not power

It is very peculiar that the cultural "power" of the center is specifically a function of its pervasive *authority*; and yet, the expectations that forge this shackle can be shattered by the simple expedient of interrupting the psychological domination of readers by their authors.

Nothing, it seems to me, can more directly serve the purposes of exploding cultural authority out of its log-jammed power-pool at the center than emphatically to display (to readers or viewers) the misery and delight that flow out of our unrecognized expectations, anticipations, presuppositions, assumptions--as they are templated and manipulated by authors and other makers.

8. Second parable

The modern period has taught us that it should be possible to dispose of the author as a separate voice and to let the text itself "speak" right up off the page. That is the kind of storytelling that might lead somewhere right now. So forget the author and leave it up to you and me, just a reader with a page of choices.

As long as we are making our way like this together, let's be intimate. You close off your attention from the room around you, and I'll push myself toward you, so that our intimacy can be meaningful for you. I know you. You pretend that you are able to read at your own pace (reading isn't like a videotape, that moves ahead at its own speed). But, as we both know, this is up to you only within very narrow limits. Outside of that, you have to rebel: you can only have a choice by shutting the book (you can choose to turn to a different channel).

It would be sexy if you skipped over me. Skip this paragraph. Go on, skim down to the next section. Take control over me that way, and don't let me fool with you. After all, I'm just going to digress, so you won't miss anything. Do it, now! One of the first great geologocal works of the nineteenth century, by Deodat Gratet de Dolomieu (whose name is attached to the mineral dolomite on account of his earlier work), was inscribed with ashes and charcoal in the margins of a Bible and on tiny scraps of paper, in the pestilential prisons of King Ferdinand of Naples, where he was detained with Alexandre Dumas, father of the famous author. Dumas survived handily; he had been hardy enough to lift his mount between his thighs by hanging onto a ceiling beam. Dolomieu lasted only briefly after the two had been released to France, where they had originally been bound after being acquitted by Napoleon from participation in his Syrian campaign. They had set sail more than two years before, aboard a vessel crowded with soldiers who had been wounded or blinded by opthalmia, epidemic in the Egyptian desert.

9. It seems that you've already signed this contract!

Here! Wasn't it great, leaving out that whole chunk of text? And see how nice and short this one is. You know let's give ourselves a big pat on the back--and skip over the whole rest of this piece together.
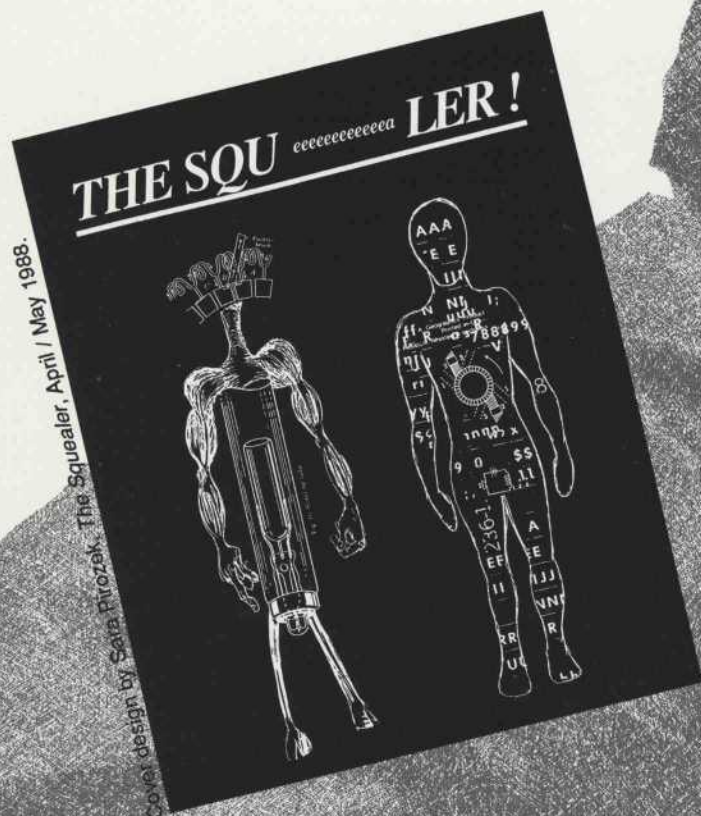
Tony Conrad

Tony Conrad, *In Line*, (1986). Photo: E. Spiro.

Tony Conrad, *Redressing Down* (1988). Photo: E. Spiro.

SQUEAKY WHEEL
Media Collective

Squeaky Wheel was founded in 1985 by a group of artists who wanted to support each other's efforts to produce film and video. At that time there were thirty to forty people who would come to meetings, and there was a lot of discussion about our needs for equipment, and how we would deal with the crisis created by the demise of Media Study/Buffalo (a media arts center that closed in 1985). With no institutional support, we feared that our media and film community, which has had a rich history of experimentation, would fall apart. Some of the people involved in the early days were Robert Rayher, Chris Hill, Armin Heurich, Ed Bak, Rachel Weissman, Jim Collins, Thom Florek, Barbara Lattanzi, Kevin Fix, Eric Jensen, Brian Spring, Tony Conrad and me. Tony Conrad was the driving force behind our organizational efforts. I think that only Tony had the vision to see our future potential. Personally, I would have been surprised in 1985 to see what Squeaky Wheel has accomplished today.

We began to look toward the New York State Council on the Arts for support. A group of about eight of us wrote about forty grants and sent them in by the March 1986 deadline. The applications weighed about twenty-five pounds, after duplication. I remember Brian Springer and I brought the applications to a print shop on a Saturday morning--we had to call every copier in the city to see who would be open on the weekend -- and it took us about three hours to get it all organized into one package. One late grant writer, a member of our group, had to meet us at the copier with her proposal. Like all of us, she found grant writing to be a slow and painful process. Brian and I made jokes on the way to the post office about the looks people at NYSCA would have on their faces when they opened our parcel.

It was an exciting time. We began a newsletter, The Squealer (Brian came up with the name at Hallwalls when, after an exhausting session of grant writing, we sat around laughing and squealing like pigs). Robert Rayher was the first of many editors. The text was hand-typed, then reduced so that every bit could be crammed into the available space. Duplicated illicitly at the university during the night, it was often distributed by hand because there was no money for stamps.

Late in 1986, the New York State Council on the Arts's Film and Media programs responded to our request (after major revisions of our initial application). With their support we moved into a rented storefront and began to develop services. Our first event was an open house during which we handed out free lingerie and old clothes--everyone was encouraged to dress in drag while we conducted a dance contest, which, I believe, was won by filmmaker Terry Klein and videomaker Ellen Spiro.

We grew rapidly. The walls were painted pink. A new group of members replenished the old. Junky old equipment was donated, people came to hang out, talk about art, make work. Our third exhibition, organized by Eric Jensen

and me, on the subject of adolescent artmaking, was featured on the cover of *The Buffalo News'*s entertainment weekly. I WAS A TEENAGE ARTIST! screamed out in orange, yellow and white letters. Everyone's favorite quote from that article noted:

> The inside is mostly pink...It has an East Village punkiness combined with a friendly Buffalo ordinariness.
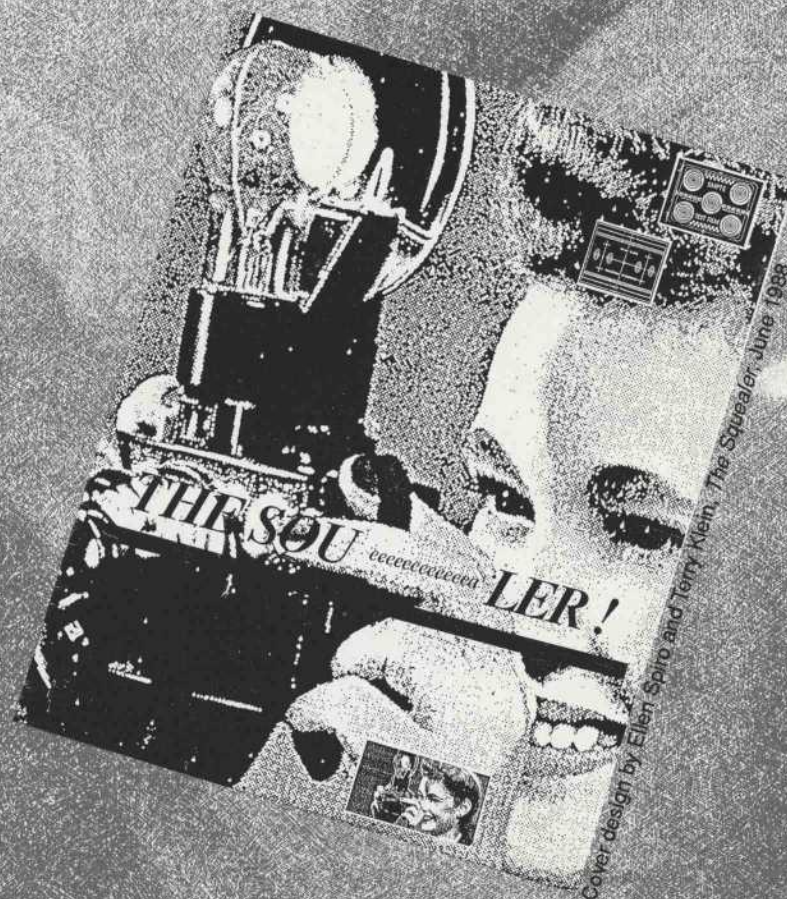
That year we had xerographers, performance and audio artists, film- and videomakers, graphic artists, painters and photographers show their work to capacity crowds.

It is now 1988. The walls, by popular demand, have been painted white. Our programs have expanded to include equipment access, training workshops, a library of magazines and tapes, a cable program, *Axlegrease*, which features work by local artists, and of course, *The Squealer*. New people continue to join the "family" of Squeaky Wheel artists. The organization will surely be challenged in the future, as it has in the past, to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and energetic group of members.

Some (not all) of the artists living and working in Buffalo have chosen to live in relative obscurity. For these artists, art making is a practice--it enriches their lives and their communities without transforming their work into a commodity. Working outside of the art market teaches an important lesson about the function of art. Although our culture calls "art" that which is sanctioned by critics and curators, there is another art practice that is informed by personal satisfaction and communal pride. With new technologies making video cheap and accessible, more media artists will be working in this "folk" tradition. It will be Squeaky Wheel's greatest responsibility to support every kind of mediamaking activity that will develop over the next decade.

Julie Zando
Director,
Squeaky Wheel

Cover design by Ellen Spiro and Terry Klein, The Squealer, June 1988.

Recently I stumbled upon a cast of a fossil specimen which is on exhibit at the Buffalo Museum of Science. The specimen is of a Horseshoe Crab, *mesolimulus walchi,* from the late Jurassic Period, unearthed in Bavaria. One hundred fifty-five million years ago it crawled along the ocean floor, circled in upon itself, and died. It is a shockingly poignant representation of the crab's last living moments.

I am inspired by the simple and elegant way in which the fossil acts as a model for narrative structure. Like all narrative, the fossil makes a connection between two events in time. The first event--the imprint of the crab's inexorable crawl--is combined with the second--the immobile crab frozen in space. It is the connection between the two that invites analysis, an analysis not unlike that used on the unconscious.

The thousands of fossils that we may have encountered along stream beds and lakeshores lack narrative progression; they represent fixed moments in space. They are like *symptoms.* Disassociated from a series of events, they operate in a conceptual vacuum: there is no discourse, therefore, no analysis that can reveal their meaning, except, of course, in scientific hypothesis.
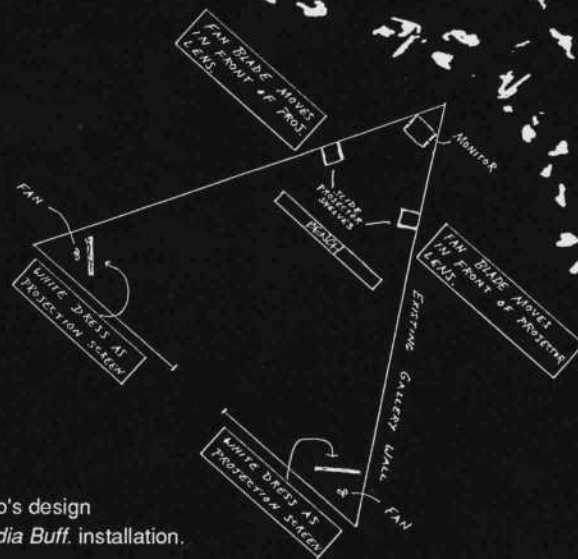
Unlike symptoms, the unconscious is representable in narrative, which is defined here as a temporal sequence of events that close upon a moral idea. Every narrative has moral authority, a moral objective that authorizes the order of events. The Horseshoe Crab offes us a meta-narrative, one in which the events represent the ultimate moral lesson--death's inevitable triumph over life.

So I am inspired by the fossil specimen because it acts as a metaphor for unconscious thought. The fragile imprints of the crab's claws can be understood as a sign of the *existence of something.* Like a symptom, they are open to interpretation, but their meaning is displaced. The imprints gain greater significance, however, when viewed as part of a series of progressive events. Coupled with the immobile crab itself, the imprints signify a death walk. Similarly, unconscious symptoms must be reinterpreted and ordered into a conscious narrative. This is the work of psychoanalysis.

My recent work attempts to analyze collective history by promoting a psychological reading of shared experience. In **Let's Play Prisoners** the narrative describes the common experience of peer pressure, and its analysis prescribes to theories of sadomasochism. In the tape a child's memories are channeled into two sections, that of Remembrance and Recognition. The therapeutic value of each memory is made operable by analysis's function to reconstruct, reorder, or narrativize, personal history. It is only when the memories are ordered and related to each other that the analysis can surface.

A native of northern New York State, Julie Zando has worked in the media arts since 1978. Beginning with photography, then moving through periods of experimentation with film and radio, Zando has now chosen video as her favored medium of expression. In 1983 she received a B.A. in English from McGill University, Montreal, and later, a Masters degree from the Center for Media Study, SUNY Buffalo. She is currently director of Squeaky Wheel, a media arts center devoted to providing support services to artists. Her work has been shown in London, Berlin, Turin, Los Angeles, New York, and elsewhere.

Julie Zando, *Hey Bud* (1987). Photo: Ellen Spiro.

Julie Zando's design for her *Media Buff.* installation.

JULIE ZANDO

Julie Zando, *Mesolimulus walchi*.
Photo: Ellen Spiro

The section "Recognition" refers to that moment when seemingly random events are understood to originate from an unconscious pattern. "Recogntion" is the threshold of therapeutic success. The **A Ha! Experience** continues the theme of recognition and explores its value to analysis. The "aha-erlebnis (experience)" is the moment when a child first recognizes his own image in a mirror. It is an experience that is critical to the development of intelligence and identity. It is also a moment when the "self" is surrendered to the control of an external influence. In the tape the narration describes a scene in which a young woman, on the brink of adolescent sexual awakening, is shocked by the presence of her mother in her bed. The image haunts her, and the imagined presence of the mother's body provides the backdrop for all further sexual encounters. All desire is subsequently understood as derivative of that experience. It is the mother's desire (her presence in the bed) that directs and controls the scene of passion; she is the ultimate subject whose love confers sexual and psychical identity.

Just as an analyst directs the unconscious mind, the camera directs perception and experience. In psychoanalytic terms the camera "normalizes" experience in a deliberate, self-conscious way; the tapes often remind the audience of the camera's analytic privilege (its power to interpret and mediate experience). Like Brecht, I am interested in self-conscious direction, except that I interpret the process as a kind of "counter-transference."

The camera as analyst is most evident in **Hey Bud**, which revolves around the suicide of Bud Dwyer, a government official who killed himself before a live television camera. The suicide was choreographed like an analytic session in which its "success" depended on a reaction from the audience that could be counter- transferred to the death experience. The role of analyst was forced upon the viewer, much the way an exhibitionist throws himself into the gaze of an unsuspecting audience.

My recent experimental narratives operate like classical Freudian "dreamwork," in which the characters struggle to resolve unconscious conflicts. My interest has been to examine the roles of the camera, audience, and subjects in that struggle for self- awareness. By emphasizing the process of analysis, I hope to break through media's resistance to interpretation.

Julie Zando

Being In Between

by Richard Herskowitz

Buffalo is the fulcrum between New York and the rest of the world. It really is. We're right in the middle. It's like a case study.

Tony Conrad

Trickster: a mythological character; breaker of taboos and violator of social authority ; mediator between cultural oppositions, who teases and desecrates both sides, and fosters the creation of new discursive differences.

New York, New York

New York City is a home base of the commercial media. Entertainment conglomerates based there dispense spectacular, technically sophisticated illusions for the world's consumption.

Out in the world, spectators are seemingly contented and pacified by the emanations from New York City. The lack of opportunity for audiences to *respond* and *contribute* to the media's messages, however, produces disturbing symptoms frequently noted by critics of the "society of the spectacle."

New York City is also a center of media art. Independent producers (independent from the dictates of the commercial industry) gravitate to this receptive environment for experimentations which shatter media conventions. Alternative media organizations proliferate--producers' service organizations (like Media Alliance and Film/Video Arts) and exhibitors (The Kitchen, Collective for Living Cinema, and Millennium, among others), all funded by a supportive state arts council also based in the city.

Among the general public, few people are aware or clear about what independent media artists are doing. Tony Conrad writes: *"They think that we're making music videos. It's really vague. You can't imagine what people's imaginations do to the independent media community out there."* 1

Buffalo, New York

About as far away from New York City as you can get and still be in New York State, Buffalo has a thriving community of independent media and other artists that, as critic Louis Marcorelles wrote in *Le Monde*, is "the spearhead of experimentation in the United States."2 Buffalo has been the creative laboratory where influential avant-garde artists such as Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman, Paul Sharits,

and Hollis Frampton got their start or settled, and through teaching and organizing artists, inspired hundreds of others to produce not only new art, but new art *movements* (such as postmodernism, the roots of which lie largely in Buffalo).

New York, however, has remained, in the words of video artist and curator Chris Hill, "the significant proscenium, conferring meaning on the work and authorizing artists within the field."3 Therefore, few are aware of Buffalo's significance, including the artists of Buffalo themselves. Conrad writes: *"We're used to feeling insecure about our city. I think we're the leaders for the country in that...."* 4

What makes Buffalo's media art so important? Its artists have strived, through their art and theories of artmaking, to liberate the entranced viewers of the entertainment industry. They have made their works function as *therapy*, both for viewers narcotized by the mass media's visual pleasure, and for other avant-garde media artists who have lost track of the social purpose of media experimentation. Buffalo artists have achieved this by developing discourses (frameworks for self-expression and argument), embodying them in institutions, and then moving creatively among them.

Discourse I: Materialist Media

In the early seventies, accomplished structural/materialist film and video artists Paul Sharits, Hollis Frampton, Tony Conrad, and Woody and Steina Vasulka signed on with the Center for Media Study (CMS) at SUNY Buffalo. Their common orientation was the investigation of the material properties of film and video. Rather than simply, and invisibly, employing the codes embedded in the technology and conventional practices of media production-- formations normally used to structure visual and aural information and produce a realist illusion--they reflexively turned their attention to the codes and technical materials themselves. Paul Sharits, for example, exposed and explored the nature of film as physical strip in **Ray Gun Virus**, and as flickering still images in **T*O*U*C*H*I*N*G**.

More than simply *examining*, the Media Study artists and students were *pushing* media machinery toward new expressions. The Vasulkas were engaged in "dialogues with tools," and their path-breaking experiments with image processing (colorizing, keying, and otherwise transforming the video image) were intended to discover images which their minds could not preconceive. The utopian goal was to expand the perceptual and conceptual range of viewers whose consciousness had been limited by realist codes and machinery. By foregrounding the media, the artists could therapeutically aid viewers to reflect on media and message simultaneously, helping to inure them from the manipulation of omnipresent, transparent media products. Ian Christie has noted that "in [Sharits'] preoccupation with the intensification of

materiality' can be read a concern equally with the emancipation of the film apparatus and the viewer from their inherited prejudices."5

Gerald O'Grady, the Center's founder and director, regularly cited the importance of the Center's explorations for public policy making, and championed new media tools' "potential for transforming hierarchical urban structures into non-hierarchical structures of participatory communities of peers."6 O'Grady, whose Center is occasionally criticized today as a "formalist" stronghold, often situated its formal explorations in a context of support for cross-cultural communication and political action (the influential presence of activist documentarian James Blue on the faculty helped define this purpose).

Tony Conrad has taught in the Center for Media Study for over a decade. His structural filmmaking in the seventies was, to an extent, compatible with his co-professors. The project of investigating filmic materiality was nearly launched by his classic minimalist film **The Flicker** *(1965) and, earlier, as a musician working with LaMonte Young, John Cale, and others, his playing emphasized tuning, pitch, precision, and other materials of musical performance. 7*

Conrad's reflexivity was, however, slightly **off**, *and invested with far more self-mocking humor than the other visionary materialists could muster. The artist's struggle with media equipment and codes, the effort to force them past their oppressive limitations, became an Herculean, or Chaplinesque, battle with an unyielding authority. In* **Film Electrocution,** *Conrad attempted to make an image without exposing the film to light, submitting it instead to boiling, baking, and electroshock; in* **Film Feedback,** *he resisted film's refusal, unlike video, to provide instant feedback by instantly processing, projecting, and refilming a strip of movie film. The Vasulkas' heroic applications of the Rutt-Etra and other image processors to re-form the video image had their pathetic flip side in Conrad's early videotape* **Cycles of 3's and 4's** *scored by a calculator: "The performance," John Minkowsky writes, "is, however, an erratic one, full of faulty computations, proving the calculator to be a computer which lends itself to human error." 8 In later videotapes, he would extend his comic critique of image processing's misplaced applications--in* **Ipso Facto,** *he satirizes the video "flying rectangle" by running around a dark room with a TV set, and in* **In Line,** *he ruminates on the possibility of transcending a mystifying self-presentation through video by employing "digitization."*

The Center was, fairly or not, perceived by some students and critics as caught in a "modernist mire," a techno-rational obsession with media forms and tools.9 And CMS Professor Tony Conrad was, consciously or not, reaching and leading others toward a post-modern challenge to this orientation.

Discourse II: Postmodern Performances

In the late seventies, an alternative to the media-visionary discourse about "codes" and "materiality" which pervaded CMS emerged at the Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, an increasingly popular haven for Buffalo artists (some CMS faculty and students included). For one thing, Hallwalls regulars (and visiting artists, like the "neo-underground" filmmakers Hallwalls imported from New York) assumed an *ironically direct* and confrontational punk sensibility, which contrasted with the intellectual and technological distance the materialist artists imposed between themselves and their audience.

New media works from Buffalo, like much of the performance art seen at Hallwalls which influenced them, exposed the artist as a confrontational figure engaged in a power relationship with the spectator. The communication of media producer and spectator, mediated by film and video, had been neglected by structural artists whose attention was fixated on the media. Like the academic film structuralists of the seventies (whose work was critically dissected and taught to CMS students by Professor Brian Henderson), collectively shifting their analytic concentration from the *filmic text* to its *dialogic context*, Buffalo's postmodern media artists remained resolutely committed to deconstructing media formations; they simply expanded the scope of their reflexivity to encompass the filmmaker/spectator relationship.

The confrontational approach can be found in the works of all three of the artists in this exhibition--Tony Conrad, Barbara Lattanzi, and Julie Zando. In Conrad's tapes, the artist directly taunts, cajoles, and manipulates the spectator's view ("I think I'll have you think about Webb Pierce," he sadistically announces in **In Line**, and proceeds to stuff a Pierce album cover in the lens and in our face while playing his music on the soundtrack). Conrad also combined and alternated his video productions with live performance art; this *inter-arts* proclivity, shared by many Hallwalls-influenced artists, can be seen as a turning away from CMS artists' careful exploration of each medium's specificity.

Lattanzi, who did structuralist filmmaking (such as the film *Skins*, which experimented with film emulsion) while influenced by Hollis Frampton and others at CMS, turned to inter-art (photography, audio, and video) installations in the early '80s. Within Lattanzi's spaces, cinematic effects are achieved through the flashing of lights and sounds upon images and words. The sequence of events, however, is less evident than in a typical narrative film. The viewer's attention oscillates, the usually darkened room (unlike a comfortable movie theater) provokes feelings of both "claustrophobia and undeterminable expansiveness," and it is this "anxiety on the part of the spectator that creates the work."10 In *Life of the Party*, Lattanzi's installation in our exhibition, written texts describe a dream and then *quiz* the viewer with impossible questions. Lattanzi turns the benign, but latently manipulative, experience of media

viewing into an evident "skirmish."11

Zando's videotapes submit the audience to a constant reminder of the camera's analytic privilege and directly address spectators in a disturbing, discomfiting fashion. Of **I Like Girls for Friends**, Zando writes, the "audience is seduced by the female narrator, while at the same time repelled by the seductress' desperate need for love and approval." **Hey Bud**'s title first seems to call out to an anonymous viewer from the screen but then turns to address Bud Dwyer, a government official who killed himself before a television audience, and who Zando harshly regards as a pornographer. The tape eventually turns its shifting address to Zando herself and other women, who "must seek power via exhibitionism and exploitation--they gain power only through death-of-self." This recognition of herself and ourselves in Bud Dwyer seems to permit the compassionate expression that quietly ends the tape: "Bud, don't."

Zando's tapes instigate and investigate spectator voyeurism, then apply psychoanalytic frameworks to expose the pathological systems which parallel our viewing conditions. **Hey Bud** explores the exhibitionism of girls (lovers?) in party dresses and a politician on television, while **Let's Play Prisoners** examines masochistic relations between mother and child, lesbian lovers, and spectator and director. Similarly, within Lattanzi's unsettling environments, the artist tells stories which manifest the passive aggression of sex roles, repressed energies being channeled into neuroses and ecstatic release, exhibitionistic and voyeuristic behavior--in order to reveal to the spectator the underlying complexes upon which "normal" viewing is constructed.

The psychoanalytic terminology has been applied by other poststructuralist academics and postmodernist artists in recent years. Yet Zando's tapes and Lattanzi's installations display more than trendy Lacanian jargon; their psychoanalysis is applied with a commitment to feminist and social liberation. Psychoanalysis is being used the way it was intended-- *therapeutically*, on behalf of emancipating spectators from the specular traps in which patriarchal culture embroils them. Similarly, eighties feminist criticism of the "white male" structuralist establishment at CMS and its fixation on "tools" may also have freed some Buffalo artists from their unreflected voyeurism.12

Chris Hill, video curator at Hallwalls, has highlighted the emancipatory, therapeutic purpose of postmodern video art in her curated program called **Media and Medicine,** which creatively juxtaposes medical and art videos.13 While most doctors and media producers share the habit of mystifying their practices in order to perpetuate their authority, certain practitioners can paradoxically bring out the "dis-ease" behind the seeming ease, and help empower the receiver. Tony Conrad's tapes, for example, disrupt the spectator's state of willing submissiveness with disturbing assertions of the maker's manipulative power. Works such as Conrad's, which when "appropriating" conventional media images and forms do so to

exacerbate their latent pathologies, can help us

recognize the potential paradoxicality of our presumed state of ease (in front of our television sets, as late 20th century consumers)--a condition that can be read, symptomatically, as either contentment or narcosis.14

Appreciation of postmodernism's liberating creations should not lead us to forget the movement's less glorious aspects. Many of the artists Hallwalls has fostered or brought to Buffalo have become "stars" by following the designated paths of postmodern artmaking--simulation, appropriation, deconstruction, etc. But these words, as Tony Conrad points out in **Infermental 7** *(while obstinately glancing away from the lens), have been used to foster an "impersonal spirit" in the world of art. If their original function was to emancipate spectators, that function is buried, repeatedly in New York and often in Buffalo, by visions of fame and fortune. Postmodernism suffers, as J. Hoberman has pointed out, from being rooted in an art rather than a social movement, unlike its historical foreparent, situationism. Appropriation of media images will be done in a more distinctive way by one artist, for example, to claim the art world's attention. In Conrad's* **Ipso Facto,** *an artist appropriates his own image "to be different," while a frustrated Conrad attempts to explain to him "You can't appropriate to be* **different."**

The insularity of postmodern artists and audiences, generally white and middle class in composition, has recently sparked rumblings of disaffection from a Hallwalls curator.15 Tony Conrad, CMS professor and a member of the Hallwalls board of directors, again helped, with his chidings of postmodernists and increased organizing of media producers, to shape the new discourse and institution that would address the others' exclusions.

Discourse III: Accessibility and Active Audiences

Squeaky Wheel was created in 1985 by a collective of media artists. They were responding to the crisis caused by the collapse of the Media Study/Buffalo equipment access facility (a center that was loosely affiliated with CMS). In rebuilding a media access facility, however, Conrad, Zando, and other local artists reevaluated the idea of *accessibility*, and devised an organization that would actively *cultivate* producers and audiences among a broader public.

Squeaky Wheel has had limited resources with which to collect film and video equipment. The organization has one Sony camcorder which is usually booked for a month in advance. According to Squeaky Wheel director Julie Zando, "If this one camera is put out of operation, the entire Buffalo region enters into a state of desperation."16 Low-tech, however, is the group's ambition-

Super 8 film and Video 8 provide the cheapest opportunities for people to cross the threshold from viewer to producer. Codirector Armin Heurich has even been shooting with and singing the praises of the Fisher-Price "Pixelvision," a black-and-white toy video camera available for around $250.

Squeaky Wheel attracts new spectators and producers of independent work by extending beyond the university and gallery environments. Its statement of purpose includes the goal of reaching audiences in "under-served and ethnic neighborhoods with outstanding programming relevant to their interests and concerns." The visit of black independent filmmaker Reginald Hudlin to the St. Augustine Center in Buffalo was sponsored by Squeaky Wheel, for example, and the Polish Community Center has been the site of other screenings. **Axlegrease** is a weekly cable broadcast of local work sponsored by the organization.

The most significant program created by Squeaky Wheel for cultivating producers is the regular "work-in-progress" gathering in the group's storefront space. Hallwalls curator Ed Cardoni described it as "a sort of public living room with homemade TV" composed on the night of his visit of "black, white, South American, Native American, Asian, working people, students, gays, lesbians, straights, etc...people from different walks of life than just the thriving but relatively small circle of art-video makers."17 The sessions run late into the night (Cardoni saw the works of twenty-seven makers in the three hours he attended) and comments are technical, aesthetic, political--and almost always *helpful* to the producer (criticisms are more gentle with beginners than with old hands).

Tony Conrad has been delivering polemical presentations lately--to the annual meeting of the Media Alliance in New York City in 1987, and in an extensive insert in Squeaky Wheel's Spring 1988 **Squealer***. In these, he adopts the role of the rube from Upstate New York confronting downstate city slickness. A professional gloss is what many NYC video artists have been opting for lately, helped by the On-Line program of Media Alliance which gains them access to commercial production houses. Many have felt beckoned by the allure of broadcasting on PBS's* **Alive from Off Center***.*

> *You know that the kind of thing that they're looking for in* **Alive from Off Center** *is not stuff that is* **not** *impressive, they're looking for stuff that is* **extremely** *impressive. They want* **quality** *work. The* **quality** *work means, by definition, something that not everybody could do.18*

Yet from his vantage point in Buffalo, between New York City

and the rest of the world, Conrad sees the amazing proliferation of home video recorders and cameras in an "onrushing tidal wave of home production." Many still lack access to cameras, and more lack the capacity to **edit**, which would create an enormous potential for independent, alternative media production on a scale unimagined by the small independent media community. Media access centers could provide home video owners with cameras and editing equipment, independent media organizations like Media Alliance could dramatically increase their membership to include a broad **amateur** constituency, and media artists could provide leadership in demonstrating how to creatively and even **illegally** experiment with visual and cultural images. However, the high-tech dazzle of **Alive from Off Center** "doesn't look like **you** could have done it at home..it's no model for anybody." 19

Even as he rakes New York City artists over the coals, Conrad appreciates their contribution to his argument:

> It's important that we have this sort of
> dead-head approach available, in New York
> City people who want to--you know--get their
> work on TV; and who believe that more
> sophisticated work should be more like
> television, and so forth--so that the Upstate
> people can counter that, and there can be a
> discourse that can really excite people,
> rather than turn them off because there's
> nothing going on. 20

For the trickster, discourses and institutions are not rigid formations, but rather fluctuating, arguing positions in a perpetual discussion. In Buffalo, the Department (formerly Center) of Media Study, Hallwalls, and Squeaky Wheel remain active and restive in a constant debate, permitting artists like Conrad, Zando, Lattanzi, and others to float between their facilities and positions to suit their evolving needs. I can't think where else such a dynamic ecology of institutions and artists exists.

1 Tony Conrad, "The 'Upstate Issue' Primer: Buffalo, The Media Alliance, and the Emergence of a Surprising New Decentralized Media Discourse," *The Squealer*, June 1988, insert.

2 Louis Marcorelles, *Le Monde*, January 2, 1975.

3 Chris Hill, "Hallwalls Media," *The Squealer*, April 1988, p.8

4 Tony Conrad, "The 'Upstate Issue' Primer," insert.

5 Ian Christie, "Paul Sharitis," in *Beau Fleuve* (Buffalo: Media Study/ Buffalo), p.7.

6 Gerald O'Grady, "Sound-Track for a Television," in *The NewTelevision: A Public/Private Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977)

7 "Virtuosity is seduction," Conrad later said in explanation of his choice to resist expressive, non-reflexive use of the elements of music. The comment illuminates Conrad's consistent refusal to submit to the conventional *power relation* between artist and spectator masked by transparent form.

8 John Minkowsky, "Tony Conrad: Films," *in Beau Fleuve*, p.30.

9 Steve Gallagher, "Hallwalls Film," *The Squealer*, April 1988, p.13.

10 Barbara Lattanzi, " Notes," *Life of the Party*.

11 Ibid.

12 Steve Gallagher, "Hallwalls Film," p.13.

13 Curated programs are themselves artworks at Hallwalls, where the curators are practicing artists. The film and video series accompanying the exhibition at the Johnson Museum features two programmed series from Hallwalls, including *Media and Medicine*.

14 Chris Hill, "Program Notes," *Media and Medicine*.

15 Steve Gallagher, "Hallwalls Film," p.13.

16 Julie Zando, "Squeaky Wheel," *The Squealer*, April 1988, p.7.

17 Ed Cardoni, "Work -in-Progress 5/18/88," *The Squealer*, June 1988, p.5.

18 Tony Conrad, "The 'Upstate Issue' Primer."

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

Acknowledgments

*cornell
cinema*